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Reading Strategies

Google Lit Trips

The Google Lit Trips application that is a part of a larger program called Google Earth applies geography to Literature in a variety of ways. Teachers can utilize this tool to illustrate the journey characters may take in a story and show the historical and significance as well as how the demographic relates to the plot. Google Lit Trips is an interactive story map that surrounds students with the story, versus a two-dimensional experience with merely text alone.

I found Google Lit Trips to be relatively easy after I conducted some research on it. Going into this project, I assumed that Google Lit Trips was a separate program from Google Earth. This made it difficult for me to understand why I needed Google Earth or what role Google Earth had in my Lit Trip. Basically, I used the Google Earth program and Lit Trips is a part of that program. Learning the relationship between Google Lit Trips and Google Earth was so helpful. I was disappointed because although Google Lit Trips provides a video tutorial, the link was not listed.

The web site did, however, suggest a plethora of links to good-quality, amateur Youtube videos that explain Lit Trips and their options for teachers. I watched a few Youtube videos in order to learn how to maneuver Lit Trips; one set of videos was far superior to the others listed. Truthfully, I did not find the Lit Trips website to be informative; I received most of the ideas and tips from teacher websites and Youtube videos. After learning how to begin, this process was very easy and enjoyable. Google Lit Trips explains how beneficial this application can be to a classroom and gives plenty of tips that become useful for once having started creating a Lit Trip, but never actually explains how to begin making one.

Fortunately, Google Lit Trips and Google Earth are free and very accessible; there is no username or password required to work with these programs.

As a future English teacher, I am very fascinated with multicultural Literature and literary figures. I decided to create a Lit Trip based on African Americans in Language Arts. I was able to show how much African Americans have contributed to Literature and culture. Also, a lot of great Black authors as well as crucial moments in Black history have occurred at significant places in our country, such as the Lincoln Memorial. I noted some specific figures and moments in Black Language Arts history, such as Phillis Wheatley and Martin Luther King Junior’s famous speech. I was able to post discussion questions and pictures to enhance this learning experience. This is useful in a RLA classroom because it shows how Reading and Language Arts classes prepare students in practical ways. For example, one of my “pins” is on the Lincoln Memorial where MLK gave his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. I posted the speech and provided discussion questions that ask students about King’s speaking style, the content of his speech, and how he demonstrates attributes of a good public speaker. Speech is a part of Language Arts and students can learn a lot more than just good speaking tips in this one experience. As is apparent, there are many ways to make this tool interactive as discussion questions are great ways to link together information.

The initial steps to this tool include downloading Google Earth and Google Lit Trips. These programs are free and are available on Google, as one would assume. Next, I would recommend searching Youtube.com for a quality tutorial that conveys the basic process of Lit Trips well and suits a person’s learning style. I found that using several videos was helpful because what one video may have lacked, another fulfilled.

Once the programs are installed and the user feels confident in the tutorials, he can create an outline. This is not a part of Lit Trips, but was recommended by a tutorial I viewed and proved to be helpful. Creating a basic outline of the places the user wants to visit and facts the user wants to include will ease the process. All the creator needs to do is submit either the coordinates or the place in the information bar on the left side of the screen. Google Earth travels there and the user is able to make a post.

By using a virtual push-pin, the user can “pin” the place and add facts, discussion questions, links, pictures, etc. Since some web codes are necessary to add images or breaks between images and text, having a reliable tutorial is necessary. In order to move to the next location, the user simply needs to type in the new coordinates or location and Google earth travels there. I found useful tips from the tutorials I consulted, such as how to properly save a Lit Trip; I will provide the link to these videos for those who would like to use this tool.

Lastly, I believe that this tool has many benefits in a classroom setting. Lit Trips can it provide students with a geographic, historical, and spatial context to their texts, therefore engaging them in a holistic learning experience. Students can experience the world and how Literature relates to culture. Also, learning how to use this program to show deeper levels of learning will give teachers the opportunity to assign more meaningful projects. Students will be able to convey what they have learned in more meaningful ways.

Though this tool is overall beneficial to learning in and out of classrooms, its shortcomings come with its lack of information. My experience with Lit Trips was positive, yet getting started was very clunky. Lit Trips is not a clearly defined application, which is great! It can be used in a multitude of venues. However, as a user, I found it confusing that there was little information provided on how to actually create a Lit Trip. The website was full of information on the benefits of Lit Trips and fancy ways to enhance a Lit Trip, but lacked some necessary fundamentals.

VERY useful tutorial:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzZD4jHSlAw&playnext=1&list=PL652D13CAC643BD6D

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ayQ0CcVwibc